Back to Medieval Source Book | ORB Main Page | Links to Other Medieval Sites |

Medieval Sourcebook: A CHRISTIAN/MOSLEM DEBATE OF THE 12TH CENTURY

A CHRISTIAN/MOSLEM DEBATE OF THE 12TH CENTURY

TRANSLATED BY KARIM HAKKOUM AND FR. DALE A. JOHNSON 1989

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This remarkable document is a part of a larger genre of Christian literature. Although dated 1165, the document which is in the hands of the family of the late Karim Hakkoum of Portland, Oregon, apparently was owned and perhaps copied by his father in 1914 in Aleppo, Syria.

We publish the first of three installments of this record of a debate between a Christian Abbot George and Moslem clerics under the protection of Saladin.

INTRODUCTION

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen. With the help of God, we begin writing a debate that happened between the monk Georgi and three Moslem theologians, in the presence of the prince Al-Khana, Al-Mushar Abul-Mulk, Gazi Al-Zaher Usef Ibn Ayub Al-Salah, the Moslem King of Aleppo and Syria, and during the reign of Leo the Armenian, son of Etienne, King of the Armenian tribe, in October 6615 from our Father Adam and 1165 A.D. God help us! The story says that the Abbot of the convent of "St. Simon the Fisherman" paid a visit to the King of Aleppo and its dependencies. The Abbot was accompanied by some of his monks. The King welcomed them, gave orders to secure all their demands, and allowed them to stay at his father's tent. Among the followers of the Abbot was an old monk who was very versed in knowledge. He spoke very well, too. Everybody liked to listen to him. he entered the convent in his childhood and profited of the books there; he acquired the virtues and the good manners of the monks. He was Abbot for many years until he became old. he was called "the monk Georgi" (George). When he met the Prince, he invoked God for him.

The Prince was pleased and asked him to have a seat. When the Abbot had been convocated by the King to fulfill all his requirements, the prince asked the monk (Georgi) to stay and continued talking to him and inquired about the convent and the mode of living of the monks. Let us relate (now) the questions of the Prince:

DEBATE ON NATURE OF MONASTIC LIFE

The Prince-- O monk, don't you eat any meat?

The Monk-- No! We don't eat any at all.

The Prince-- Don't you get married?

The Monk-- No, Prince; on the contrary, we avoid women.

The Prince-- Why? Is this from God? But he created humankind as a man and a woman. He said also: "...have meat for eating." (You may eat the meat).

The Monk-- We do not forbid (eating) the meat. But we intend to have a light life, not material, in order to be nearer to God by lightening our body. The iron is purified from its impurities the closer it is to the fire. And as water becomes clearer, the water allows the sunlight to penetrate (it)--Don't you see that the rays let the light pierce through as far as they're thin and transparent? Don't you know that steam rising from the ground outshines the sunlight? The reason, O Prince, that is inside of us from God, becomes dark with luxurious life, and it keeps us away from God at the range of its darkness. And with our distance from God we attach ourselves to the corporal matters and to the love of the actual life. We avoid not only meat and women, but all corporal delights and everything that charms the five faculties. We expect, by using these privations, to obtain the graces of God in His eternal kingdom. He said,"you will not get the joy in the eternal world, if you don't endure the sorrows and difficulties in the perishable world."

The Prince-- O monk, you are just right. But, God granted us these and those.

The Monk-- Our God permitted to you to do as you like and gave you the liberty to enjoy the corporal felicities when He says: "I'll give you in the heaven a river of milk, a river of honey and beautiful women."

The Prince and the Monk were talking so, when three theologians came to the Prince and saluted him. He ordered them to sit down. And when they saw the monk, they spoke with the Prince in Turkish, saying,"where is this monk from? for what purpose is he in your presence?"

The Prince: This monk is from Simon's convent; he came to us with other monks to resolve some problems with the Sultan (King). How do you like his appearance? One of them called Abu-Zaher, from Baghdad said, "may I be made your ransom, O Prince, he has a smiling mouth and a handsome face. How regretful that he is Christian."

The Prince: Would you like to have a debate with him in the matter of religion? They answered yes.

DEBATE ON THE SALVIFIC NATURE OF GOD

Then, they looked at each other. Thus, one of them, called Abu-Salamah Ibn Saad, from Mossul said,

Abu-Salamah (The Moslem) --"O monk, we revere and honor your Christ and make his rank over all prophets, except Mohammad, Prophet and Apostle of God. But you, Christians, decreased his esteem and you do not honor him, while God honored him and inspired him the Koran, as a light and mercy. You do not agree that he is the Prophet of God; so he shall confute you on the Resurrection.

The Monk-- Abu-Salamah, each question has an answer, But we did not come to your place to have a religious debate with you; But as petitioners. We do not need to talk to you, but with what it pleases you; because we know that the fury is yours and that you

are boasting about that. A wise man said," Be cautious with them as long as you live in their house."

The Moslem-- Fear God, O Monk, because of what you mentioned. We are a people of law and justice; and nobody here is willing to discuss with you in a bad way.

Then, ***the Prince*** glanced at the Monk and said,-- "O Monk, I had been born from a Greek (Christian) woman. So, you can answer as you like, without fear. "Then he pulled out his own seal from his finger and put it on the finger of the monk.

The Monk-- Abu-Salamah, we do not want to give lies instead of truth. But we fear that you bring lies following the roughness of your nature. Don't you say that we do not revere Mohammed, nor confess that he is Apostle of God? Well, we will give you a clear proof from God (to ascertain our sayings).

The Moslem-- You could not succeed, at all, even if you try to do the impossible efforts.

The Monk-- The truth will appear. Abu-Salamah, don't you confess that God created all creatures?

The Moslem-- Yes, all which are in the heaven and in the earth; everything visible and invisible have been created by God, by His will.

The Monk-- Are there any people created by God and some people created by another God?

The Moslem-- No! The Creator created them and He is the One God I worship, and there is not another God.

The Monk-- Do you think that God willed the salvation of the whole world or He wants to save only a specified people among His creatures and destroy the rest? Don't you confess that God is rich, generous, and magnanimous? If you don't, then you attribute avarice to God; like a man who prepared food for a hundred persons, but when they came, he drove them out and said," Go away, I have no food for you!" By this way, he showed his avarice.

The Moslem-- I confess that God is rich, generous, magnanimous and the Creator of all creatures, and that He desires their salvation.

The Monk-- If God wants the salvation of the whole world, His messengers should be sent to the whole world, too. And anyone who pretends to be a Messenger of God needs a sign to corroborate his assertions; he needs also a power from God to confirm his message.

The Moslem-- What is the power and the sign?

The Monk-- Those that were with the Apostles of Christ.

The Moslem-- What is the power?

The Monk-- They are three: to make miracles, to speak various languages and avoid worldly things. While you have three opposite traits.

The Moslem-- Like what?

The Monk-- the menace with sword, tribute, and conviction. Those traits have been found in Mohammed. Evidence of God's

Authority in the Apostles

Then, ***the Monk*** turned out to the Prince and said, " by God, O Prince if someone comes now to you and pretends to be a messenger of the King to you for so and so purposes, and you did not find in his possession a letter or a seal from the King , will you believe that he is the messenger of the King ?

The Prince-- By God, no! On the contrary, I'll consider him like a liar and traitor.

The Moslem-- What are the signs and the proof of the Apostles of Christ attesting their acquisition of the power to make miracles, to speak various languages and to preach in the whole world?

The Monk-- The sign is in your presence and the proof is evident: at any direction you look, east, west, south or north, you find the devotion to Christ at the farthest regions of the world. No one region is empty of it (this devotion). This is an evident proof that the Apostles of Christ traveled through the whole earth and spoke all languages. You cannot find a people, a language or a tongue without knowledge of Christ. The prophet David predicted that when he said," They went to whole earth and their speeches have grown in the regions of the world." This is also an evident proof that the Apostles spoke all languages. Do you have, Abu-Salamah, any doubt on those two things?

Abu-Salamah-- This is evident, without any doubt. Sermon on the Power and the Sign

The Monk-- I'll prove, now, that they made miracles, not by the force of their words, but by the power of their Sender, from the submission of the barbarian peoples to them. Their preachings

were not dependent on their tolerance, neither menace, nor by the sword. They didn't take money. They were, in majority, illiterate fishermen and tent tailors. But the power received from Christ helped them to govern this world. When the Christ had sent them to preach in the world, He entered the room where they were gathered after His resurrection, while the doors were closed. He gave them peace, first because they were fearing the Jews. Then He blew on them and said," receive the Holy Spirit. This Spirit will be your voice. By this voice, you will raise the dead, heal the sick, and vanquish the Kings. If you remit the sins of people they will be pardoned; but if you retain them, they will be so. Give free of charge, as you received so." He told them also," Don't bear a staff, neither haversack not food; don't have two clothes, nor two shoes. Don't bear copper in your girdle." Now tell me, what's stronger of that sign? If you tell me that their orders were too soft, I'll answer you that those were not theirs, but of the Christ, their Master. Here they are, "To whom who slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the left one"; and, "if someone wants your cloth, give him your coat also"; and, "if someone uses you for one mile, go two miles with him. Love your enemies. Bless those who persecute you. Do good to those who afflict you." Tell me, who could listen to these ordinances and accept them, if the miracles did not astonish the whole world? Then, they believed them (the Apostles) and trusted their preaching. Look, O Moslem, at the preachings of the Apostles, as they preached to the speakers, scientists and the Kings, saying, "believe in God. He has been born from a woman; he ate food and drank water; has been beaten and whipped; people mocked him and spit on His face; they slapped him and put on his head a crown of thorns; he has been crucified and buried; (but) he rose from the dead." No one believed them. But people mocked them; denied their sayings, beat and chased them away. The Apostles said, " People, if you

deny our preachings, we shall prove the truth. In fact: bring to us the crippled, blind and leper people, along with crazy, dislocated and dead people." They said, " In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up, you dead person." That person rose from the dead. As well as from other sicknesses, which were healed also. Then, people believed them and worshipped their God; for their acts testified for them. Some people closed their eyes and their ears, like the snake that closed her ears to avoid hearing the magician's voice. But those who worshipped Satan, through adultery, voluptuousnesses, viciousness, and avidity and the target of which was to satisfy the desires of their bodies: all of those became as a flume (of smoke) and their idolatric adoration is over. The heavens, the earth, God and his angels testify that the Apostles are the messengers of the Christ and that their religion is the right one. And your prophet, Mohammed also testified for them, saying in the Koran, " We inspired the Koran as a light and guidance and confirming what is in their hands (Christian) from the Bible and the Gospels." So, if your prophet and your Book confirmed the Gospel, you have to do so, otherwise you treat your prophet and your books as liars. Debate on the Integrity of the Gospels

The Moslem-- I trust the Gospel and all its contents. But you altered it to be as you wanted.

The Monk--Do not say something you can't prove, because, in the end, you will be ashamed, like that one who prefers to cover the sunlight. Tell me, Abu-Salamah, how many years had passed from the Christ until Mohammed?

The Moslem-- I don't know.

The Monk-- I give the answer: from the Christ to Mohammed, six

hundred and some more years passed.

The Prince--You're right, Monk. That is what we found in the history.

The Monk-- Were the Christians, then, in the whole world?

The Moslem-- Yes, they were.

The Monk-- Like in the present time?

The Moslem--Yes and more (then they are now).

The Monk-- Could you count (the number of) the Gospels which existed (in that time) on the earth (in the world) in various languages?

The Moslem-- We couldn't.

The Monk-- Let us suppose that some people in the West had altered their Gospels. So, how did they reach those who are at the end of the earth in the East? Same thing for those who are in the North towards the South. It's impossible. If that was possible you were, then, founding the apocryphal Gospels with a part of Christians. While if you pay for a trip over the whole world, you will find the Gospels in various languages analogous to those received from the Apostles of our Lord the Christ. No difference between any of them, even in one letter, except the particular traits of each language. I, hereby, give you an example which lets you believe me: If someone comes and shows a Koran different from that known to you now, and says, " this is the Koran inspired by the Prophet," while it is not, will you accept it?

The Prince-- No, on the contrary we shall kill him and burn his

book.

The Monk-- How could you equalize the Master and the servant, the Creator and the created or God and the man? Debate on the Integrity of Mohammed

The Moslem-- Don't you know, Monk, that Mohammed governed the Arabs, and that he is God's Prophet and Messenger, because he guided Ishmail's descendants and passed them from the idolatry to the worship of the Living God, like what did Christ and his Apostles?

The Monk-- I know that Mohammed ruled the Arabs and passed them from the idolatry to the acquaintance of God, but not to the true acquaintance, because he intended to rule them in order to have them under his jurisdiction, much more than to give them information about the Creator. If you can be patient a little and calm yourself, I'll give you a testimony on behalf of me and all Christians concerning your prophet Mohammed, to let you know why we do not honor him, neither call him Prophet or Messenger.

The Moslem-- As the Prince allowed you to speak as you like and gave you security, and the permission to speak about Islam, you can say anything you want.

The Prince-- Abu-Salamah, the Monk spoke as it is suitable to the truth and as accepted by reason.

Abu-Salamah-- Give us what you gave about Mohammed.

The Monk-- You should know, Abu-Salamah, that Mohammed was from the tribe of Koreish, and descendant of Ishmail, son of Hagar the Egyptian, slave of Sarah, spouse of Abraham. He was

an Arab nomad and camel driver. In his trips, he came to Jerusalem where he had been welcomed by a Christian Nestorian, called Buheira. When he asked Mohammed about his religion, he found him to be one of the pagans. Those were the sons of Ishmail. They worshipped an idol called AL-AKBAR (the greatest). They used to put around him poems containing desire and love written on tablets which they suspended over that idol. They served for prayers and had been called the seven "usudallakat" (suspended). When he (Buheira) knew that he (Mohammed) was from that tribe, he got sympathy for him, due to the similarity of languages, the friendship, and the desire of knowledge. Then he read to him some chapters from the Gospels, the Bible and the Psalms. When he returned home, he said to his friends, " Woe unto you! You are in flagrant error and your worship is null and unprofitable". They told him, " What is your problem, Mohammed?" He answered, " I found the true God." They asked, " What is his name?" He replied, " His name is ALLAH. He created the heaven and the earth and all creatures in it. He sent me to you as a light and a sign of his compassion." They said, " Could you show him to us to know where he is?" He said, " He resides in the heaven and sees all, but he is invisible." They told him, " We have a deity which we worship and honor. We inherited this worship from our ancestors who gave us the liberty to satisfy our desires with everything we own." Then Mohammed told them, " That one who sent me to you told me that he grants you what is better and greater than what you say." They asked, " What is it?" He said, " It is a paradise where he transfers you after your death. It contains food, drinks, and women." They asked, " What is the form of the food, drink, and women" He replied, " Rivers of honey, milk and wine, with beautiful women; there you will be not thirsty nor full of tears." they said, " Are you the Messenger of God?" He replied, " Yes."

They said, " We fear our god AL-AKBAR." He said, " worship God and honor AL-AKBAR." Some of them said, " We believe in God, you said the truth," Then he passed through another group from koreish, Muhammed's tribe. He, later met another group. Those people allowed their members to marry their daughters and sisters. Those were their customs, before they knew God. Mohammed wrote to Buheira all what happened to him. Buheira prohibited those customs and with big efforts, he succeeded to draw them to the first cousins. When he got enough adherents from Arabs and their aristocracy, some remained reticent. Then he desired the monarchy (sovereignty) for himself and formed an armed detachment to fight his contradictors and said, " Those who enter the Islam, will be safe;" and said, " The inhabitants of the heaven and the earth entered the Islam by their will and (some) by force." Then, he attacked a group convinced another group with adorned words and arguments. His target was to rule them and rush them in order to reach the rest of women, because he was very avid of them. He desired them at a high degree. In confirmation of that, he was not satisfied with his numerous women, but desired Zeid's wife when he saw her and took her from him by force, pretending that God gave her to him as a wife, instead of Zeid. He spoke to his followers in this concern saying, " After Zeid had accomplished his desires from her, We (God) gave her to you as a wife, Mohammed." He pretended that God inspired him to do so. But his followers said, " Messenger of God, what God granted you is not permitted to anyone else."

The Moslem-- Woe unto you, uncircumcised! Zeid had asked him to take her and sworn that she will be unlawful for him.

The Monk-- He had to, otherwise he would have the same destiny as others.

The Moslem-- What happened to them?

The Monk-- Didn't you hear about the bedouin killed by your prophet, on his bed, while God forbids killing even the birds in their beds. When asked by his followers, " Who killed the slave?" "My sword," replied Mohammed.

The Moslem-- If you find some faults in the life of Mohammed to blame him for, you must confess that he had the biggest and most important honor and the greatest credit with God for what he did to Ishmail's descendants.

The Monk-- He guided you following his will, not as would like God. And Mohammed did not ignore that he and you are far from the truth and the right way, saying, " I don't know what happens to me and to you. Are we in the clarity or in the dark?" He said also, " Fear God as hard as you could, maybe you will succeed." And he assigned that in each prayer you request to be guided to the right way by saying, " Guide us (O God) to the right way." So, if you are right, then you don't need to ask for the righteousness. Bur he asks God for help. But let us forget what we said. Have an example about this. Suppose, O Prince, that I left your presence in search of without leaving the way guiding to the Fatherland . I'll not need guidance but the help to reach the Fatherland. .

The Prince-- Quite right,

The Monk-- If Mohammed knew that you were on the right way, he would not order you to request from God the guidance and the maturity. Besides, knowing that his prayer is not accepted by God, he ordered you to pray for him, and told you, " You, believers, pray for him and grant him salvation."

The Moslem-- Don't you know God and his angels pray for Mohammed? Don't we have to pray for him, too?

The Monk-- You should, preferably, pray for yourself and ask the pardon for yourself; not to be like that one who is hungry and asks food for others; or like that one who suffers from an injury and asks medicine for somebody else, So, if you, with God and his angels pray for Mohammed, who will accept your prayers? If this is your opinion, you equalize God and angels with the mankind.

The Moslem-- The prayer of God is a grace accorded to his worshippers.

The Monk-- Who has benefited from the grace of God and his angels doesn't need your prayers. You should better pray for yourself.

The Moslem-- Don't you pray, you Christians, on your Christ?

The Monk-- Absolutely not! On the contrary we pray to him, because he is our God and Creator and he accepts the prayer of his servants if they do, and forgives their faults.

The Moslem-- What an evident blasphemy and bad idea! You worship a created man, born from a woman, who suffered ignominy. That is what you confess, and you, Monk, do not deny that. You mock with insolence our Prophet Mohammed, the Chosen.

The Monk-- Upon my life, we do not bring anything from ourselves but from your Book and your Koran. Don't you confess that Mohammed was Bedouin and from Koreish?

The Moslem-- Yes.

The Monk-- Don't you know that he had many women, some against and some concubines. Don't you agree that he was so passionate towards women that he used the sword to kill those who did not obey him, and that he took Zeid's wife?

The Moslem-- Yes, that was God's order, for God inspired him to do so.

The Monk-- Don't you confess that he died and had been buried with thirty members with him under the soil? We mentioned only a few of the attributes of your Prophet, those which you admitted. So why do you contest it?

The Moslem-- Woe unto you! We contest what you make God a child, and that the Christ is God's son, and that he is Eternal God and Creator of the creatures while he is human and was born from a woman and God considers him like Adam to whom he said, " Be!" and he has been (created).

The Monk-- So, Abu-Salamah, you believe in all what your Prophet mentioned in your Book and that (this book) was inspired by God?

The Moslem-- Yes, everything mentioned in the Koran was inspired to Mohammed.

The Monk-- The Koran doesn't mention that the Christ is the Spirit of God and his Word given by God to Mary?

The Moslem-- Not eternal (word) but created.

The Monk-- Was God, at any time, dumb, deaf, or empty from

any word or spirit?

The Moslem--God forbid! God, his Word and Spirit are always (present).

The Monk-- Is God's Word Creator or created?

The Moslem-- Creator.

The Monk-- You worship God along with his Spirit and Word, isn't it?

The Moslem-- I adore God, His Word and His Spirit.

The Monk-- Say now, then, " I believe in God, in His Spirit and in His Word."

The Moslem-- I believe in God and in His Spirit and in His Word. But I do not make them three, but one God.

The Monk-- This is my opinion, too; and my beliefs and those of all Christians of Orthodox faith. I like now to explain the meanings of the Holy Eternity: the Father is God; the Son is His Word; and the third (person is) the Holy Spirit.

The Prince was laying down. He then stood up, glanced to the Moslem, laughed and told him,-- " Abu-Salamah, the Monk Christianized you and introduced you to the Christian's religion; you are then Christian."

Abu-Salamah was furious. Then, a jurisprudent called ***Abul-Fadl Al-Halabi***, told his friends: If you had permitted me from the beginning, I had a dialogue with the Monk and I showed you his defeat. Afterwards, he looked at the Prince and said, -- "Be

informed, O Prince, that the non-believers are in the fire (in the hell) and whoever approaches them burns himself, and Satan who is the spirit of the tyranny speaks through their mouths."

The Monk-- Why do you insult us? Why do you attribute to us what is related to you and to your prophet? Didn't we talk and prove that the Christ is the Spirit of God and His Word from your Koran and your Prophet? If you are sure that what we cited is satanic, it should be from your Prophet and your Book.

The Prince-- Shame of you, Abul-Fadl! Your silence was better and more fruitful than your speech. I wish God had furnished you with silence and dumbness; then we would have been quite at ease.

Then Abdul-Fadl, ashamed, went away.

Note [Halsall]

I did contact Fr. Dale Johnson [email: dalej@colubs.com] about this text, and he gave permission for it to be in the Medieval Sourcebook. What I am unable to do is verify the historicity of this document, beyond the notes by Fr. Johnson at the beginning.

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